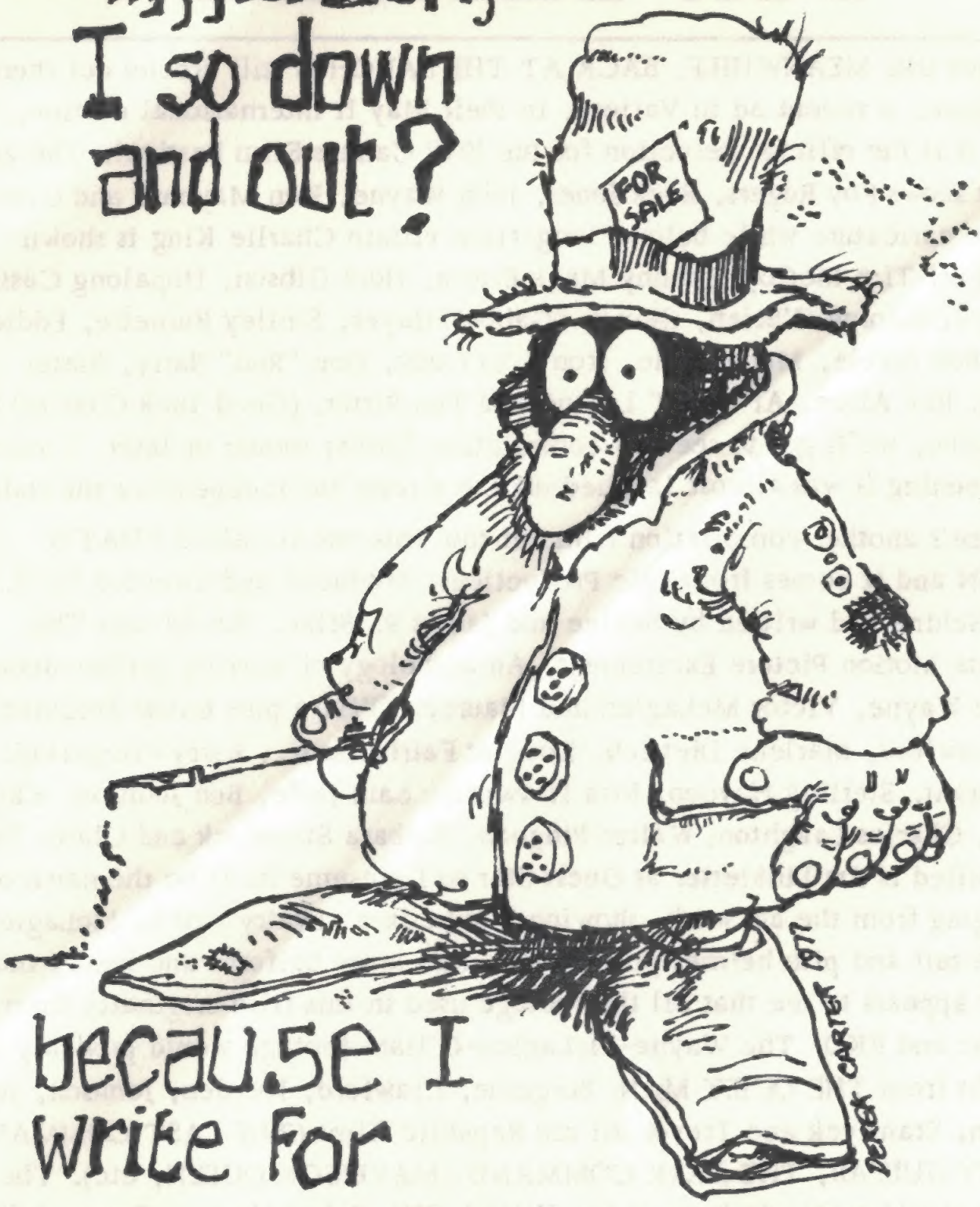
Why, you ask, am I so down and out?



because I write for

CAPTAIN GEORGE'S Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, JUNE 3, 1977 NUMBER 432

that's why!!

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON DAYNARD

Seems like MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH is still around out there somewhere. A recent ad in Variety, in their May 11 International edition, claims it is the official Selection for the 1977 Cannes Film Festival. The ad artwork shows Roy Rogers, Buck Jones, John Wayne, Ken Maynard and Gene Autry in caricature while below, long-time villain Charlie King is shown holding off Tim McCoy, Johnny Mack Brown, Hoot Gibson, Hopalong Cassidy Bill Boyd, George O'Brien, George "Gabby" Hayes, Smiley Burnette, Eddie Dean, Bob Steele, Monte Hale, Iron Eyes Cody, Don "Red" Barry, Buster Crabbe, Rex Allen, Al "Lash" La Rue and Tex Ritter. (Good luck Charlie!!) So, maybe, we'll get to see this compilation flicker sooner or later. I heard at one screening it was almost laughed off the screen but it depends on the audience.

There's another compilation film out too; this one is called THAT'S ACTION and it comes from Epic Productions. Produced and directed by G. David Schine and written by Schine and James R. Silke, the ad says The Ultimate Motion Picture Excitement. An anthology of starring performances by John Wayne, Victor McLaglen and Maureen O'Hara plus Ernest Borgnine, Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Barry Fitzgerald, Cary Grant, Sterling Hayden, Rita Hayworth, Sam Jaffe, Ben Johnson, Katy Jurado, Charles Laughton, Walter Pidgeon, Barbara Stanwyck and Claire Trevor. (Also billed is Art Linkletter as Guest Star so I presume he'll be the narrator.)

Judging from the art work, showing Wayne in a cavalry outfit, McLaglen in a khaki suit and pith helmet plus Wayne in an army uniform and sundry other tips, it appears to me that all the footage used in this film originates from Republic and RKO. The Wayne-McLaglen-O'Hara footage would probably be the fight from THE QUIET MAN; Borgnine, Crawford, Hayden, Johnson, Jurado, Pidgeon, Stanwyck and Trevor all did Republic films (THE LAST COMMAND, JOHNNY GUITAR, THE DARK COMMAND, MAVERICK QUEEN, etc). The RKO footage would certainly have to be GUNGA DIN; Fairbanks Jr., Grant, Jaffe while the Laughton-O'Hara footage is probably THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. I can't figure out the Rita Hayworth footage unless it's from one of her early westerns at Republic. However, she's the least of our worries. Oh yes, the ad finishes with "And With a Cast of Thousands." I'll say. With all that footage, Lord knows who'll show up.

Judging from the initial reaction to MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH, THAT'S ACTION may suffer the same fate but only time will tell.

(Editor's note: C.M. "Parky" Parkhurst sends along a note from Jim Shoenberger which says in part: "Packy Smith... was in Hollywood and had just signed a contract with N.T.A. to help produce a 'Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch' type film, only this time using footage from the serials of Republic.")

CAPTAIN GEORGE'S PENNY DREADFUL, a weekly review established in 1968, is published by the Vast Whizzbang Organization at Memory Lane, 594 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

DON MILLER

THE SMALL SCREEN: Never having encountered either The Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew in my youthful mystery browsing, I have nothing with which to compare the present video hours bearing their respective names. On that basis, I must say that if the books were conceived with the same quality, I missed something.

For the shows are good, or at least maintain a respectable average. They alternate on Sunday evenings, thrown into the breach by ABC when the Bill Cosby variety hour failed to hold up, and the competing Disney program on another network proved too strong. From such an unpromising beginning, with no inkling given as to what might transpire, the results have been surprisingly pleasing.

Actually, there have been filmic precedents for the both Drew girl and the Hardys. The Disney factory presented a bunch of Hardy episodes as part of the Mickey Mouse Club decades ago, unrepentantly missed by this viewer. Harkening even farther back in time, Warners filmed a series of four low-budget features based on the Nancy Drew character in 1938-39, and they were delights. But as theatrical features, they remain a part of another era, far removed from TV scheduling except as part of some dim Late Show. However, the quality matters little for the purposes at hand--yarns about youthful sleuths are surefire for young audiences, particularly the pre- and early-teenage groups. It's an extra treat then, when the entries turn out to be not only suitably entertaining for their own audiences but for grownups as well--there are any number of shows produced with less finesse, and far more juvenile even though palmed off as adult fare.

This is not to overpraise the series. After all, their scope is limited, the goals moderate. But within their framework, it's a workmanlike job in every respect. Though two separate sets of characters, presumably one for the lads and the other for the distaff side, the plots could probably be interchanged, and no doubt will should the series go on to a lengthy run. The Hardy Boys, well played by Parker Stevenson and Shaun Cassidy, have an understanding father, nicely etched by Edmund Gilbert, and a girl aide, the trim Lisa Eilbacher. Nancy Drew, played by a slightly mature Pamela Sue Martin, also has an understanding dad, the always-competent William Schallert, and two young aides. The plots are similarly devised, both leaning heavily upon the "impossible" gimmicks such as disappearing rooms, alleged ghosts and other spooky contrivances, all explained logically by solution time.

There has been no stinting on the production values. Sets are sturdy, the technical end excellent, and some rather prestigious names continually appear in the credits, including writers like Robert Pirosh (Battleground) and directors like Noel Black (Pretty Poison). There's a small army of producers receiving credit, but the man who seems worthy of deepest bows is Glen Larson, formerly of the McCloud series. He guides the whole shebang and even composed the catchy theme music.

PETE HARRIS

CONFESSIONS OF A COLLECTOR, Chapter XXXVIII: It would be difficult to pinpoint the exact moment that old comic books were transformed from yesterday's trash into today's treasures. The resurgence of interest in comic books of the 1930s and 40s can, of course, be measured against such yardsticks as Jules Feiffer's 1965 book, The Great Comic Book Heroes, which was excerpted that same year in Playboy. The first time that Golden Age comic book collecting surfaced was in the Aug. 21, 1965, issue of New Yorker magazine which ran a piece on the second annual ComiCon of the Academy of Comic Book Fans And Collectors which had been established in '63. (At that Con, incidentally, according to the New Yorker article, Batman #1 was auctioned off for $37 and Action #1 for $40.) But, it's safe to assume that Golden Age comic book inflation set in much earlier than that.

Before that magical turning point, whenever it was, old comic books were merely paper survivors that cluttered up basements and attics and garages. Old comic books were routine items that littered second-hand stores where they might fetch a nickel or three cents, depending on whether they had covers. The world's first comic book generation suddenly had other things on its collective mind, and it firmly believed it had outgrown such childish pleasures. And so, a king's ransom in comic book futures was slowly dissipated... until that day when somebody actually sold an old comic book for more than its cover price. Whenever that day was, though, I believe I can top it.

As most of you may or may not know, American comic books were not available in Canada during World War II because of a Canadian government embargo. The result of that vacuum was Canada's first and only indigenous comic book industry, a large part of which was Bell Features and Publishing Co. in Toronto whose titles were Dime, Active, Wow, Funny Comics with Dizzy Don, Commando, Triumph and Joke. In early 1945, there appeared in Bell's publications an ad in which Bell offered a premium price for specific back issues. The ad didn't explain why they wanted these particular issues and I have never been able to find out why. What Bell was offering was 50 cents a copy, FIFTY CENTS, five times the cover price, for issues 1, 2, 9 and 13 of Active, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10 of Dime, 6 and 7 of Joke, 4 of Funny, and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Triumph. And they wanted anywhere from four to 20 copies of each.

Being at the age when money was always in short supply, I leaped at the opportunity. Ransacking the giant corn flakes carton containing my collection, I came up with all but one of the issues Bell wanted. I packaged them, sent them off and, sure enough, a cheque for $9 arrived in the mail. In one fell swoop I had recouped most of what I had spent on Bell's product at a dime a throw. Of course, I had no way of knowing (nor had anyone else) that years later I would pay several dollars an issue to regain only part of the collection I once had. But what the hell, if we had known then what we know now, the whole collecting thing that engulfs us today would never have happened. And the world would be just a little bit duller.